

Research Paper Draft 1

April 15, 2008

Romantic or Problematic

On June 12, 1967, “the U.S. Supreme Court decided one of the most recognized cases in American constitutional history: *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*. Although white and black Americans were far more likely to date and marry within their own race than outside, the cultural environment had changed considerably since this historical court case. Mildred Jeter, a woman of African and Rappahannock India descent and Richard Perry Loving, a white man, were residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia who had been married in June 1958 in the District Columbia, having left Virginia to evade the Racial Integrity Act, a state banning marriage between any white person and a non-white person. Upon their return to Virginia, they were charged with violation of the ban. In January 1959, the Lovings pleaded guilty and were sentenced to one year in prison, with the sentence suspended for 25 years on condition that the couple leave the state of Virginia” (Dean 1). “For nine years after their arrest they waged a legal battle through the courts, and in 1967, the Supreme Court reversed the Lovings’ convictions. ‘Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual and could not be infringed by the State,’ wrote by Chief Justice Earl Warren in *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*. The Supreme Court decision effectively invalidated all existing antimiscegenation legislation” (“Interracial” 2).

On account of this case, a film production company produced a movie called *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* in order to criticize the *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*

court case and the society. “The movie concerned Joey Drayton, a young white American woman who had a whirlwind romance with Dr. John Prentice, an African American she met while on a holiday in Hawaii. Prentice planned to fly to New York later that night then on to an assignment in Switzerland. Joey planned to join him there soon to be married even though she had only known him for a very short period of time. The plot was centered on Joey’s return to her liberal upper class American home in San Francisco, bringing her new fiancé to dinner to meet her parents and the reaction of the family and friends towards this interracial relationship” (Dean 1).

So, what is interracial relationship? According to the dictionary, interracial relationship is similar to miscegenation which is the mixing of different races, such as marrying, cohabiting, having sexual relations, having love affairs and having children with a partner from outside of one's racially or ethnically defined group. However, what makes this interracial relationship issue so opposed by the society in the past, and even nowadays? Someone may believe that all races should try to preserve their unique cultural and genetic heritage. Besides, others may think that it is complicated to communicate with people other than their own race because of different points of views and connections. Yet, will anyone worry about how those interracial relationships people think? They may deem that no one bears in mind their interest and no one cares about how they feel. In fact, as everyone living in this world, human beings should be more considerate for the people in interracial relationships because it is not an easy decision for them to make and they may struggle a lot before they can make their decision. Thus, in this paper, I will explain the issue of interracial relationships in the context of conflicts and difficulties, advantages and

disadvantages, interviews with different races of students in UIUC and most importantly, why interracial relationship is so controversial.

In order to understand interracial relationship clearly, I will explain the reasons why interracial relationship is so difficult to achieve. There are many reasons such as family opposition, societal intolerance, language barrier and child bearing problem. These are the common obstacles that interracial relationship people may have. First, “one of the most difficult issues that an interracial couple often faces is strong opposition to their relationship from their families. Parental approval generally will have great psychological importance to a couple’s marital relationship and it can impact a couple’s relationship at every phase of their lifecycle. Parental and family response can impact lifecycle rituals and events such as the wedding ceremony or the birth of a child in the family” (Usita and Poulsen 3). From my own understanding, family opposition is the most complicated difficulty to deal with in an interracial relationship because some interracial couples may forgo a wedding ceremony in light of their family’s disapproval and lack of support for the relationship which will make them feel insecure. Additionally, marital difficulties can be compounded by each spouse’s sense of divided loyalties or unresolved family issues. The pressure of racial communities may also affect family views on mixed cultural relationships. As no one is living on an island all by oneself, the gossips between people may have a significant influence on them. For example, the common gossips such as people doubt the couple is not a perfect match for each other or why one side chooses another side to become his or her spouse. Although the interracial relationship couples have gone through many conflicts and vexations before they get married, their self-confidence

may still be very low towards their marriages. Thus, family opposition is definitely a major difficulty for interracial relationships.

Secondly, “some segments of society still view such interracial unions as something of an anomaly that does not readily fit into the racial stratification system. Cultural and racial differences often become magnified during a crisis situation, and the lack of support and isolation from the society at large poses a threat to the stability of interracial relationships” (Usita and Poulsen 4). In fact, interracial couples will sometimes intentionally isolate themselves from their own communities in an attempt to establish independence from prejudices and disapprovals. However, this mechanism can result in total isolation from support. Besides, it is also important to bring up the difficulties that interracial couples may face, including their families because those difficulties can create tension within the relationship and to recognize that most interracial couples are aware of the biases against interracial marriages that exist in society and have given considerable thoughts to how they will approach the matter within and outside of their communities. Hence, societal intolerance should have an impact on interracial relationship.

Lastly, there are some minor reasons that make interracial relationships more difficult such as language barrier and child bearing problem. First, language communication is a major component of forming a successful marriage. From a panel in the University of Michigan-Dearborn’s Conversation on Race on March 14, 2008, they suggested that “the number one advice they would give anyone who is entering into an interracial relationship was communication. Besides, they should do the talking up front and dig deeper. Usually the couples mean the same thing but just communicating it differently” (Herrera 2). So basically, language communication can easily act as a bridge to consolidate the marriage

between couples if they try to inform their spouses. On the other hand, “raising biracial children in a manner that is congruent with both partners’ childrearing views is another consideration for interracial couples” (Usita and Poulsen 6). In fact, childrearing practices are deeply rooted in cultural and racial contexts and finding some middle ground on this issue can be difficult for some interracial couples. However, conflict like this may be avoided by adopting a policy where one parent is totally in charge of childrearing practices and rituals. Another approach is the “hand off” approach where neither parent wants to impose their personal parenting style on the children. Yet, what I have just said above are examples that usually makes interracial relationship difficult, there are still tons of other reasons for different interracial relationship people out there in the society.

So, if interracial relationship is hard to accomplish, why people will want to try it? This question may link to the advantages and disadvantages that interracial relationship will have. According to the e-mail interview I conducted with Meiling, an Asian student in the UIUC, she had given me her own point of view about the advantages and disadvantages for interracial relationship. In the interview, she said, “the advantage is that each side would bring a unique perspective to life that the other may find captivating, however, this is also a disadvantage as it creates a gap in perspectives that they may be unable to bridge” (Meiling 1). I think these are really true. Those interracial relationship people not only can contribute what they know and what they do not know and can also share their distinctive culture to the other races and thus this can form a cultural bridge between races. Therefore, we can say that “interracial relationship can increase the opportunity for development for social competence, personal growth, and social network expansion”. (Usita and Poulsen 7). Besides, “racism has declined as a result of interracial

relationship” (Saia 3). Since a race is accepting the other one, this will lower the prejudice and the stereotype of both races and can eventually lessen or eliminate racism. However, at the same time, these interracial relationship people may also easily form a connection gap between them because they are raised differently in their own culture and way and the viewpoints in which they get in touch with are not the same and thus they may have a varied frame of reference towards the same matter. However, I am not saying that there is no successful example for interracial relationship. In Meiling’s interview, she told me that “I have friends who are mixed, that is, one parent is Caucasian and the other is Asian. Their parents are still married and my friends turned out fine” (Meiling 1). Furthermore, from another interview I conducted with a Sicilian American female student, she said, “one of my friends is Caucasian dating a Filipino and they are very happy and have been together for five years” (Unnamed 1). Although there are advantages and disadvantages for interracial relationship, still it can actually be possible and successful just depends on whether the interracial relationship people are willing to communicate and compromise.

However, even though my interviewees had provided some successful interracial relationships examples around them, what I have observed in the campus of UIUC is kind of dissimilar. On March 25, 2008, I had made an observation for about 45 minutes at the ISR dining hall. When I went into the dining hall, there were twenty something tables with different groups of people such as Black, White, Hispanic and Asian. Besides, the noise level in the dining hall was kind of loud which meant basically, each table was having a conversation. Among those twenty something tables, only four of them contained students of different races in which three of them comprised large group of male and female, included the Black, the White and the Hispanic. For the remaining one, there was an Asian

boy and a White girl in whom I was so sure that they were boyfriend and girlfriend because of the intimate reactions they had. One remarkable note for this table is that there are many boyfriend and girlfriend tables at the dining hall, but only one is in an interracial relationship. While for the three large groups of students, I found a really interesting pattern. The White rarely talked to the Black, they just talked to their same race or the Hispanic. While for the Black, they were the one who spoke the least, either to their own group of people or the other two groups. For the Hispanic, they were the one who talked the most because they could chat with all three groups of races. From this observation, I may assume that that Hispanic was the easiest to get along with; the White was probably in the middle. On the other hand, the Black seemed to be remote. So, if there is an interracial relationships among these three groups of people, in my standpoints, I may think that the least possible should be the Black and the White while either the Hispanic and the White or the Hispanic and the Black is the most likely to happen. Yet, I am not saying that the Black and White combination is not possible, but these are just my assumptions based on the observation I have carried out.

As a conclusion, what makes interracial relationship so controversial? In fact, this controversy has been surrounding the world for a really long time; the main opposition is the belief of “race purity”. Since every race has its own pride, they think if their descendants get married or having a relationship with the race inferior than them, their union may lower the race purity and thus will have an influence to their race pride. Moreover, there is also a great tendency among people to distrust anything that they are unfamiliar with or that appears to be different. This may turn out to be some sort of isolation. When most people meet someone different from them, they will automatically

get away from them because they will think of the problems such as the different languages they speak, the religions they have, the races they belong, the socioeconomic classes they hold and a variety of other excuses. Therefore, when you come to interracial relationship, you may sometimes feel powerless to change your family's attitudes and the difficulties you may face. However, you still have the power to make your interracial relationship either a romance or a problem just based on the effort you put on it.